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18 October 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Caveat Regarding SNIE 10-3-61

1. This memorandum is for your information and for the record.

2. The point is that US thinking with respect to possible use of US and other SEATO troops in South Vietnam appears quite rapidly to have gone considerably beyond the point we were asked to consider in our recent SNIE 10-3-61 on that subject. Although we do not propose a new SNIE, at least until policy thinking has clarified, we consider it important to note that the conclusions of SNIE 10-3-61 do not necessarily apply to types and levels of US/SEATO intervention which I understand were discussed in the White House on 11 October.

3. The facts: On Saturday, 7 October, Bill Bundy met with you in your office. Amory and I were present. He passed you a letter requesting a special estimate to be completed by close of business the following Tuesday (10 October). (Copy of the letter attached). He asked for a Special National Intelligence Estimate regarding probable Communist reactions if some "10-15,000 combat troops" of the SEATO powers and other combat and support elements to a total of perhaps "25,000 men" were deployed in South Vietnam. In our discussion Bundy noted that the number of US forces being contemplated at that time was of the order of 7,000. The mission of the forces is spelled out in paragraph two of Bundy's letter.

4. I believe that it was the very next day, Wednesday, 11 October, that you went to a meeting at the White House to discuss the general subject of the above estimate. From what you reported to some of us orally, the number of US forces under consideration for commitment to South Vietnam was several times larger than the 7,000 mentioned by Bundy. It is my understanding that high level doubts as to the desirability of committing Free World forces to South Vietnam were raised specifically with reference to this larger number.

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5. I think that it is important to emphasize that the Communist reactions which we estimated were reactions to the smaller rather than the larger force and that any significant change in the size, composition, or mission of the assumed forces might require considerable modification of the conclusions we actually reached in SNIE 10-3-61.

6. Item 2 of the minutes of USIB for 12 October 1961 (M-178) makes oblique reference to this matter. The language here employed is probably appropriate for a document of the Secret classification which has a broad circulation. Our own record, however, it seems to me, should be fuller.

SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director,
National Estimates

Attachment:
cy Bundy ltr, 7 Oct 61

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